

## GOOD MORNING AMERICA INTERVIEW

Guest: Retiring CIA Director William Webster

May 9, 1991

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The editor of the report is Steve Ginsburg. Tim Ahmann, Peter Ramjug, Paul Schomer and Eric Beech also are available to help you. If you have questions, please call 202-898-8345. For service problems inside the District of Columbia, call 202-898-8355; outside D.C., call 1-800-537-9755.

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CHARLES GIBSON: This morning Judge Webster is joining us from Washington to talk about the CIA and American politics and how or whether he managed to keep his head above the fray. It's nice to have you with us, Judge Webster.

CIA DIRECTOR WILLIAM WEBSTER: Thank you, Charlie.

GIBSON: The president was effusive in his praise yesterday about the job you'd done at the CIA, but I had a call from an old Washington hand within a couple of hours that said you'd been pushed to resign. The newspaper stories this morning say that you were encouraged to leave.

Were you nudged at all out the door?

WEBSTER: I never felt nudged by any member of the administration, and least of all by the president. He could not have been more supportive. So that's where my responsibility lay and I think it's inevitable that someone in this position is going to have some ducks nibbling. I tried to overlook that. You never like it, but you have it.

GIBSON: Well, I notice you're careful to say you weren't pushed by the president. Were there others?

WEBSTER: No. No one ever came to me on his behalf or on their own behalf. But there comes a time when you feel that the administration should have a new lease on life and I should have a new lease on life, as well, and this seemed to be the time.

GIBSON: You said yesterday you hate to leave, but something tells you it's a good time. What told you it's a good time? Why not?

WEBSTER: Well, for one thing, the war is over. The war consumed a good deal of our energies. Intelligence made an extraordinary contribution to that end result. I'm very proud of the people who did so much. We're pointed in the direction of the '90s, substantially different than the directions of the '80s. Our priorities are in place. Our budget requirements are there. Superb people in leadership positions throughout the community.

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It's a good time, I think, for someone with some new ideas to come on board and a good time to leave feeling good about it.

GIBSON: Well, you raised the CIA role during the war. Some people question that role. Obvious question: did the CIA properly anticipate the moves of Saddam Hussein?

WEBSTER: Again, we have to put a time frame. In 1989, we probably underestimated his capacity for aggression because his country was in such a state of disarray that the entire intelligence community was of the view that although he wanted to be the bully in the neighborhood, it would take him maybe up to three years. But in January, 1990, as his rhetoric increased against Israel and against Kuwait, we began watching him more closely. I think you know that from July 23 on, we tracked every military move, made accurate projections of when he would attack, and from then on, intelligence supplied the information that made those smart bombs go where they were supposed to go.

GIBSON: But then why were the political leaders of so many nations caught so much by surprise when Kuwait was overrun so quickly?

WEBSTER: The political leaders in the Middle East were listening to Saddam Hussein and believing him. That is not something that the intelligence community was doing.

GIBSON: How about the political leaders here?

WEBSTER: Well, they were influenced by that, but they were also getting our intelligence of the actual movement of his troops from 30,000 to 70,000 to 90,000 to a military offensive line-up, plus other intelligence that said, when it finally happened, he's going to do it.

GIBSON: In December of last year, there was considerable debate raging in this country about whether or not we ought to offensively drive the Iraqis out of Kuwait or whether we ought to let sanctions work. You had testimony that all of us watched so closely in front of a House committee in which you argued that if sanctions were maintained until December of this year, Iraq's economy would be devastated. Were you ignored in that?

WEBSTER: Charlie, you didn't really read my testimony. I said that it was unlikely that sanctions would have any significant impact for up to six months--not the other way around. And I said also that we could not guarantee that sanctions alone would do the job, that it required a military threat and political unrest at home.

So I was not ignored, and when we gave a more specific response during the debate, at the request of the same chairman of the committee before which I had testified, we said that we did not believe that sanctions alone would cause him to leave Kuwait in six to 12 months.

GIBSON: There were also reports of differing estimates, between the CIA and the military command, of the damages inflicted by the air war. Were there disagreements?

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WEBSTER: There were some differences, and I felt, because the president was going to have to make a decision on when it was time to use the ground forces, and that depended on the extent of destruction of Saddam's ground forces, his tanks and armored carriers and artillery, that we needed to rationalize those differences. National technical collection is not complete, it's not synoptic, but it gives a very clear view of what we know has happened versus what reports in the field--pilots and so forth--would have to say.

We did rationalize those at the time that the president made his decision to enter in.

GIBSON: And Judge Webster, finally, the next director is going to chart a new course for the CIA. The raison d'etre for the CIA has always been to protect this country against a threat from the Soviet Union and that threat, many see now, is diminished. Is there a new raison d'etre, a new reason for being, in effect, for the CIA that will arise in the next few years?

WEBSTER: Well, I think it's the same reason, but it's a much broader responsibility. We're no longer confronting, as we did at the beginning, 40 some odd years ago, an East-West polarized situation where there was one single target--the Soviet Union and its satellites. We now see, with the absence of the Cold War, areas of instability throughout the world, including the Soviet Union, areas of opportunity, including the former Soviet bloc countries that are now reaching for democracy, tremendous unrest in the continent of Africa, in the Middle East, problems between India and Pakistan, problems in the Far East, Korea.

We need to understand those. We need to understand them on the ground. We need to have technical ability to use the assets that were developed at great expense for the other purpose, to apply those to those standards.

And finally, transnational issues--narcotics, the evil spread of, proliferation of chemical, biological, nuclear weapons through the Third World, the problem of terrorism around the world, which we've gotten a good handle on, and economic competitiveness that affects our national security. We have to do all of that.

GIBSON: Judge Webster, it's always been a pleasure to deal with you in your years at the FBI. We didn't deal as often when you were at the CIA, for obvious reasons, but it's been a pleasure to have you here. Best of luck to you and I hope we have a chance to visit again in the coming months.

WEBSTER: Thank you, Charlie. I enjoyed being here.